DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 435 JC 920 116

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TITLE Practices and Trends in Academic Transfer.
INSTITUTION American Council on Education, Washington, DC. National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer.
SPONS AGENCY Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 6p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Transfer Working Papers; v3 n3 Mar 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; Cooperative Programs; *Educational Trends; Higher Education; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Program Descriptions; *Transfer Programs; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

During the 1980's, two landmark transfer projects were funded by the Ford Foundation. The Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program (UCC/TOP) aspired to increase the number of minority students transferring to and succeeding at four-year institutions. Many of the practical strategies developed during participating colleges, such as inter-session and summer programs with four-year colleges, honors programs, and enhanced communication between two-year/four-year faculty, remain pertinent. Later, the Ford Foundation funded the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer to expand upon the successful models created during the UCC/TOP project. Three institutions, Laney Community College in California, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Virginia, and the Houston Community College System in Texas, have been involved in both projects. The steady, collaborative efforts of these colleges underscore the following national trends: (1) awareness of partnerships is surging; (2) meetings between two- and four-year college faculty are increasingly common; (3) partnerships are expanding to include more institutions; and (4) academic partnerships are expanding vertically as well as horizontally, and partnerships are increasingly emphasizing math and science. If such partnerships are to realize their full potential secondary schools should be involved, reading and writing collaboration must not be ignored, and semester-length programs and interdisciplinary partnerships should be investigated. (AC)

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WORKING PAPERS

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3
MARCH 1992

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As anyone in a marriage or long-term relationship can attest, partnership is difficult. But when one considers the differences between America's two- and four-year colleges--the former brash and open-armed, the latter more reserved and cautious--it is not surprising that there have been few enduring partnerships between them. Amazingly, though, in the past decade, colleges with only a passing historical interest in one another, have come together and found the first, tentative encounters promising. While marriage may not be in the future, more and more institutions are dating.

In surveying practices and trends in academic transfer between consenting institutions, I thought it might be useful to summarize some findings from two landmark transfer projects; the Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program (UCC/TOP) and the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer (NCAAT). These institutions have been involved in both projects. Their efforts suggest some trends and next steps.

My formal involvement with transfer began in 1983 when Networks, which I direct, became the resource institution for The Ford Foundation's newly created Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program. The first major national effort devoted to transfer, UCC/TOP aspired to increase the number of minority students transferring to and succeeding at four-year institutions. The 23 participating two-year colleges received monies to refine their own programs and to share problems and propose solutions as a consortium. After three years, this consortium issued a report, *Transfer: Making It Work* (AACJC, 1987), that chronicled the efforts of practitioners across the country to improve transfer by providing students with more skills, information, and incentives.

Many of the practical strategies set forth by consortium colleges in *Transfer: Making It Work* are still pertinent today. For example, inter-session and summer programs were undertaken

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with four-year colleges; the justly-heralded Vassar/LaGuardia Community College summer program still serves as a model for partnerships around the country. The Community College of Philadelphia and others designed (or redesigned) honors programs to emphasize the reading- and writing-intensive environment that students would experience on four-year campuses. At UCC/TOP colleges--from California to New York--key faculty met with their four-year counterparts to discuss standards, review syllabi, and reconsider placement procedures for transfer students.

The current work of the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer has advanced beyond that of UCC/TOP. Colleges are expanding upon the successful models created in the 1980s, as well as tackling new problems that have come into focus. More four-year colleges are now participating--in part attracted by the lure of foundation monies, but also because of widespread concern over inconsistent transfer numbers and student performance. Increased trust between two- and four-year colleges has led to more joint problem-solving efforts, and more faculty from two- and four-year colleges now see inter-institutional collaboration and curriculum development as legitimate parts of their day-to-day responsibilities.

Three Transfer Programs that Span a Decade

Three institutions involved in both Ford projects exemplify the way in which many programs have evolved and offer useful models to institutions in the early stages of academic transfer work.

Laney Community College (Oakland, CA). One area on which Laney has concentrated since the 1980s is improving student performance in mathematics and science. In UCC/TOP, Laney focused its first efforts upon the promising strategy of designing small study groups in math and science courses for under-achieving minority students. The study groups were modelled on a program pioneered at Berkeley and utilized Berkeley staff and graduate students as group facilitators. Results were impressive; over 75 percent of students participating in the study groups completed their courses successfully.

Later, more ambitiously, Laney joined forces with another Peralta Community College--Merritt College--plus San Francisco State University and Holy Names College to form the Bay Area Partnership. This Partnership is developing transferrable core curriculum courses that will be offered at multiple sites. Courses are being designed in calculus, biology, and critical thinking, among others. A Curriculum Task Force will meet to standardize and integrate the core courses--either disciplinary or cross-disciplinary--at the four colleges.

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (Richmond, VA). J. Sargeant Reynolds' curricular efforts began with information-sharing and extended to curriculum and faculty development. Initially, J. Sargeant Reynolds and Virginia Commonwealth University were interested in intervening with 9th and 10th grade typing students--likely high school drop-outs. After staff from both colleges and a successful alumnus from the high school visited classes to describe the long-term advantages of the college preparatory track, more than 15 percent of the girls changed to the more rigorous curriculum.

As in Oakland, the current partnership focuses upon curriculum and faculty development. This winter, the project is sponsoring a conference, "Using the Graphing Computer in the Classroom," which will feature experts from the National Science Foundation, a reception, and a

dinner to attract an expected 50 math faculty and administrators from the two colleges. In addition, three VCU faculty (including the chair) will teach calculus and other courses at J. Sargeant Reynolds, while the Reynolds chair and two colleagues teach the same courses at VCU. Both institutions anticipate that this new, working proximity to one another will enable them to explore vexing problems in greater depth--such as how to place transfer students more accurately in entry-level courses at VCU.

Houston Community College System (Houston, TX). In UCC/TOP, the Houston Community College System (HCCS) identified academic advisement and support services as key components of successful transfer. Weekly counseling sessions were instituted to assess students' abilities in basic skills courses and offer information about the transferability of courses. Houston sought information on how well their students were performing after transfer. Senior institutions provided information that included grade point averages and a performance comparison of HCCS and other community college students.

At present, the University of Houston and HCCS are jointly developing English, history, and mathematics core curriculum courses, that will focus on achieving a common level of competency at both institutions, with the aim of improving long-term learning outcomes for students. In addition, building upon the UCC/TOP experiences, after the new core courses have been developed, the project will develop tracking mechanisms at the University of Houston to determine how students who have completed these courses do with respect to grade point average and graduation rate.

Trends and Entreaties

The steady, collaborative efforts in the San Francisco Bay Area, Richmond, Houston, and numerous other cities underscore emerging national trends:

- Awareness of the value of partnerships is surging, with colleges committing time, expertise, and (sometimes) funds to specific projects.

- Periodic meetings between two- and four-year faculty are increasingly common. Significantly, virtually all successful NCAAT programs feature ongoing meetings of departmental faculty from two- and four-year institutions. Face-to-face meetings of biologists, historians, and mathematicians are essential if courses are to be deemed equivalent and if viable collaborative programs are to emerge.

- Partnerships are expanding to include more institutions. As multiple two- and four-year institutions join partnerships--as in Oakland--it is appropriate to talk of city-wide or even regional partnerships.

- Academic partnerships are expanding vertically as well as horizontally. Colleges increasingly acknowledge the key role of the K-12 systems. Operationally, the advent of middle colleges--alternative high schools located on the college campuses--has expanded the academic visions of thousands of high school students and is beginning to have an impact upon colleges' curriculum planning.

- Perhaps responding to national pressure, academic partnerships are increasingly emphasizing mathematics and science.

However, if curricular partnerships are to realize their full potential, more must be done:

- The new cooperation between two- and four-year colleges would gain in efficacy if it regularly involved the schools. While NCAAT deliberately focussed upon two-year/four-year partnerships, substantial changes in student performance are most likely to occur when a writing or mathematics sequence is planned by all three systems.

- The current emphases upon collaborative programs in mathematics, welcome though it is, threatens to push vital reading and writing collaboration to the background.

- Despite research indicating the positive impact of summer and intersession programs, new curricular partnerships seem still to concentrate on semester-length programs. Both high schools and colleges need to conclude that calendars dictated by agrarian cycles are dated and wasteful, that sacrosanct summer and intersession periods can be more meaningfully used.

- At this stage of partnering, projects are still largely departmentally-based and organized. The rich potential of interdisciplinary courses remains fundamentally untapped.

Increasingly, as colleges collaborate and their efforts mature, the rewards of partnerships--not the difficulties--will come into focus.

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